



**THE CEDARS
SCHOOL**

28th March 2018

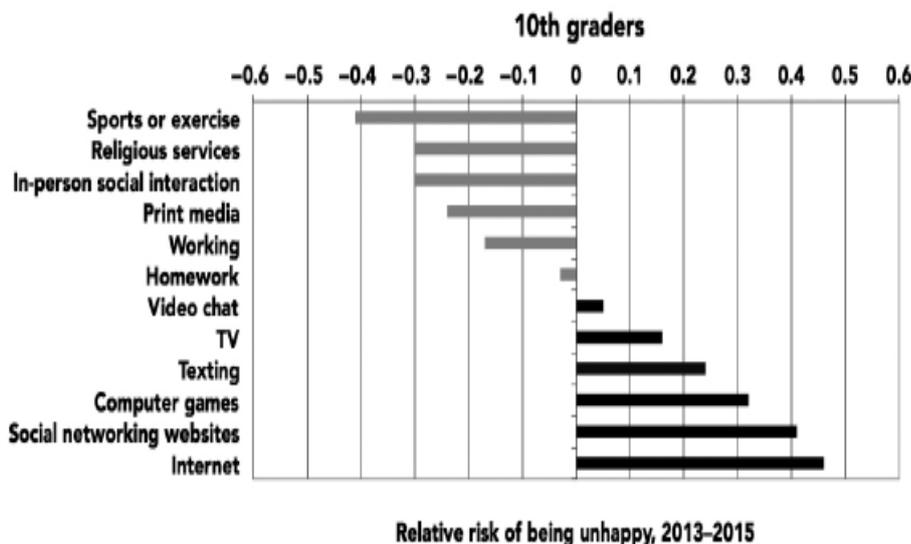
Dear Parents,

Generation Z, and their parents

Whatever one’s view on the current political climate, most people would agree that we live in unusual and rather unsettling times. Less obviously, but no less importantly, we are going through a time of rapid and radical change in the area of family life, and especially in the way that teenagers spend their time. This point is made emphatically in a new book, *iGen*, written by Jean Twenge, a researcher into ‘intergenerational change’, a discipline I never knew existed. Dr Twenge describes how the smooth trend lines which map changes from “boomers” through generation X to the Millennials have recently given way to dramatic “cliff edges” for generation Z. (For those of you who don’t know your ‘X’s from your ‘Z’s, we parents are mainly boomers or generation X; our school-age children belong to generation Z; and millennials are somewhere in the middle.) Remarkably, the most spectacular changes seem to date from as recently as 2012.

It’s not all doom and gloom but some of it is. In general, generation Z go out with friends less, date less, drink less alcohol and are less likely to have a paid job while they study. They tend to be more risk-averse than teenagers of times past and are in less of a hurry to grow up. They are, however, spending much longer online than even teenagers of a few years ago were. Twenge ascribes the sudden changes since 2012 to the fact that ownership of smartphones among teenagers has been almost universal since that date.

Is it really such a big deal if teenagers spend a lot of time online, especially if by doing so they are exposing themselves to less risk outside the home? For Twenge, the answer is clear. Even though these changes are recent, there is already a substantial and growing body of research indicating that teenagers are paying a high price for the time spent online in terms of their mental health. To give you a flavour of the research I have copied below a graph from *Monitoring the Future*, a large-scale project in America. The graph relates time spent on certain activities with the likelihood of being unhappy. Lines to the left are good; lines to the right are bad. US 10th grade corresponds to Year 11 in the UK.



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Of course, some people will point out that other technological advances such as the printing press and television also caused anxiety to parents in their day. That may be true but it does not lessen the need for a clear-eyed appreciation of the challenges which face our children in 2018.

Another recently-published book, *The Collapse of Parenting* by Leonard Sax, sheds further light on the parenting challenges of our age. I strongly recommend reading the whole book but one of the important points Sax makes is that parents now exert less influence over their children than in previous generations. Again, it is a generalisation but a useful one. For Sax, the disconnect between parents and their teenage children is so great that, to all intents and purposes, many teenagers are brought up by their peers. Sax has his own theories as to how we have come to this point but his solutions are of more immediate interest to us.

Sax enjoins parents to “take control”, not by being overbearing but by becoming important figures in their children’s lives. This inevitably involves spending as much time as possible with them, enjoying their company and taking an interest in their trials and tribulations. It is difficult for many of us to balance family obligations with the demands of work but getting into the lives of our children makes it much easier for us to fulfil our parental responsibilities which, on occasions (and probably quite often), will involve the exercise of authority. If we don’t do it, no one else will.

I realise this may all sound a bit negative and from next term we will use the bulletin to make positive suggestions for offline activities. Obvious ones which spring to mind are: outdoor activities such as hiking or, for the more adventurous, climbing; and cultivating a sense of wonder through good reading and visiting places of interest.

An eventful term

Following on from our inspection in January, I received a letter from the Department for Education a week or so ago informing me that the official capacity of the school has now been raised to 260. This is the third such increase we have been granted in the last twelve months and the challenge we now face is to develop the school site so that we can continue to grow. Happily, there has been significant movement on that front since January and, having appointed planning consultants and architects before Christmas, we are now in discussions with the council on making the site masterplan a reality. Our need for space is a good problem to have, as people keep pointing out, because it is driven by a significant increase in demand for places at the school.

Debating has gone from strength to strength and we were able to host the London final of the English schools debating competition this year. Thanks to the enthusiasm and hard work of Mr Trafford and the Debating Society, debating has become more popular and we hope to see further progress over the coming months. It has also been encouraging to see the revivification of house competition and, during the last few weeks, there has always been at least one event in progress. Next term’s house schedule looks even busier and thanks are due to Mr Ashton and Mr Thisanayagam.

Another welcome development has been the introduction of weekly seminars covering a range of themes from the aristocracy to bitcoin. So popular have the seminars become that we may need to make them twice-weekly in future. Well done to those boys who have contributed so far and I hope many others will follow their example.

We have also introduced termly certificates in all subjects for Years 7 to 10 and you will find the first list of winners attached. It is a great opportunity to celebrate some of the achievements of the boys this term. I firmly believe that winning one of these prizes is within the capability of all boys here and so, if your son’s name is not here this time, I hope he will be spurred on to even greater efforts next term!

No account of the term would be complete without mention of William Awomoyi’s election as Croydon’s first young mayor. It was a remarkable achievement to secure such broad support across the borough, especially

as the youngest of 28 candidates, and William has given a great example of determined pursuit of a worthwhile goal in the face of considerable difficulty.

“Good exam results are made in the Easter holidays”

Today, I received an article written by Barnaby Lenon, the Chair of the Independent Schools Council. It contains such good advice that I have attached it in full to this letter. If your son is in Year 11, he really should read it. Others will also find it useful.

Easter

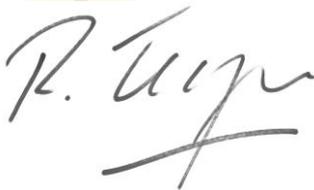
During today’s final assembly, we focused on the extraordinary transformation of the apostles over the first Easter and how, through God’s grace, those who previously had been fearful and embarrassed ended up giving their lives to witness to the resurrection of Jesus. There’s surely a lesson for us all there, that if we let God act, we can do great things. As Pope Francis puts it:

“Let us accept the grace of Christ’s Resurrection! Let us be renewed by God’s mercy, let us be loved by Jesus, let us enable the power of his love to transform our lives too; and let us become agents of this mercy, channels through which God can water the earth, protect all creation and make justice and peace flourish.

“And so we ask the risen Jesus, who turns death into life, to change hatred into love, vengeance into forgiveness, war into peace. Yes, Christ is our peace, and through him we implore peace for all the world.”

I wish you and your family a peaceful and happy Easter.

Yours faithfully,



Robert Teague
Headmaster